

THE PROBLEM OF COLONIZATION

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361 estimated at 50,000-70,000 inhabitants. Official Soviet sources, while glossing over the strange origin of Magadan, have described it as an important cultural centre, including several houses of culture, dozens of clubs, cinemas, libraries, and two theatres, one for drama, the other for musical comedy. Former prisoners who passed through Magadan have asserted that the actors of the drama theatre were convicts, but Soviet sources of more recent date declare that they were recruited from Moscow drama schools. By December 1952, Magadan had grown large enough to deserve administrative promotion. A decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet transformed it from a district town into a provincial town.¹⁶

Magadan is the largest locality which owes its existence to Dalstroy, but there are others further inland. One of them is Atka - a name which, at the first glance, seems to have an exotic Asiatic flavour, but is in reality an expression of the unromantic technological mind of Soviet Russia. It is simply an abbreviation of 'Avtotraktornaya Kolonna' (Motor Tractor Column), a tribute to the pioneer role of motorized transport in a territory without a railway. Even in 1946 Atka had large garages and automobile repair works where work never stopped, 'not even for a single minute'. Moreover, Atka produces electrical equipment for the purposes of Dalstroy.¹⁷

MILITARY COLONIZATION

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241 Another interesting and unusual form of colonization introduced in the Soviet Far East is what might be described as 'military colonization'. Discharged soldiers of the Red Army, artillery and cavalymen, infantry and members of the signal corps, as well as sailors of the Red Fleet, settled down with their families in the fertile border regions on the Ussuri River. These military colonists formed a kind of peasant militia ready to be called up at any time for the defence of the 'socialist fatherland'. The first 'Red Army' and 'Red Fleet' collective farms were formed in 1931. They soon became the pride of the entire Soviet Far East and the head of the administration of the F.E.T., Krutov, described them as a shining example for the entire Far Eastern peasantry.

Not all demobilized soldiers became agriculturists; some of them remained in the Far East as lumbermen and fishermen and many also worked on the Far Eastern railways, as has already been mentioned. At the beginning of 1938, 5,000 demobilized Red Army men were accepted into the service of railways. They were all provided with houses and small plots, and each of them received a government grant for the purchase of a cow.¹⁸

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241 This last point is particularly characteristic of Soviet colonization policy in the Far East. To increase its defence potential in the Far